



THREE SWANS

HOTEL, EATERY & COFFEE HOUSE

A BRIEF HISTORY

BY WILL SWALES



WELCOME

Welcome to a brief history of The Three Swans Hotel, Hungerford. During the late spring and early summer of 2016 we had the good fortune to be able to revitalise and refurbish one of our fabulous sister inns, The King's Head in Richmond, North Yorkshire.

During the planning stage of this project we started to look hard at the building and its many historical attributes, at how some parts of the building had been added during its 300 years of existence. And whilst contemplating the small changes and additions we wanted to make, it dawned on me that we will only be its custodians for a generation or two at most. I can't foretell who will follow but started thinking about who had been its keepers in the past.

Therefore, we asked a good friend if he would research The King's Head and try to separate the fact from the fable; what's true and what has been elaborated during the storytelling process over the years.

Will Swales made such a good job of The King's Head that we then asked him to complete the same task for The Three Swans Hotel.

What follows is that research. We think it's as accurate as can be, but naturally there are many gaps and we would welcome any additional information.

I hope you enjoy this small booklet and the hospitality and service we provide within The Three Swans Hotel. Please feel free to take this copy with you.



Kevin Charity
Managing Director
The Coaching Inn Group

www.coachinginngroup.co.uk



**“THE PRINCIPAL AND INDEED THE ONLY INN
IN THE TOWN IS THE THREE SWANS, WHICH
IS SUPPOSED TO BE THE OLDEST IN ENGLAND.”**



A CENTURIES-OLD INN ON THE OXFORD TO SALISBURY ROAD

"...the inn ... was noted for being close to the mid-point between the two cities."

A description of Hungerford in a national directory of 1792 stated: 'The principal and indeed the only inn in the town is The Three Swans, which is supposed to be the oldest in England'.

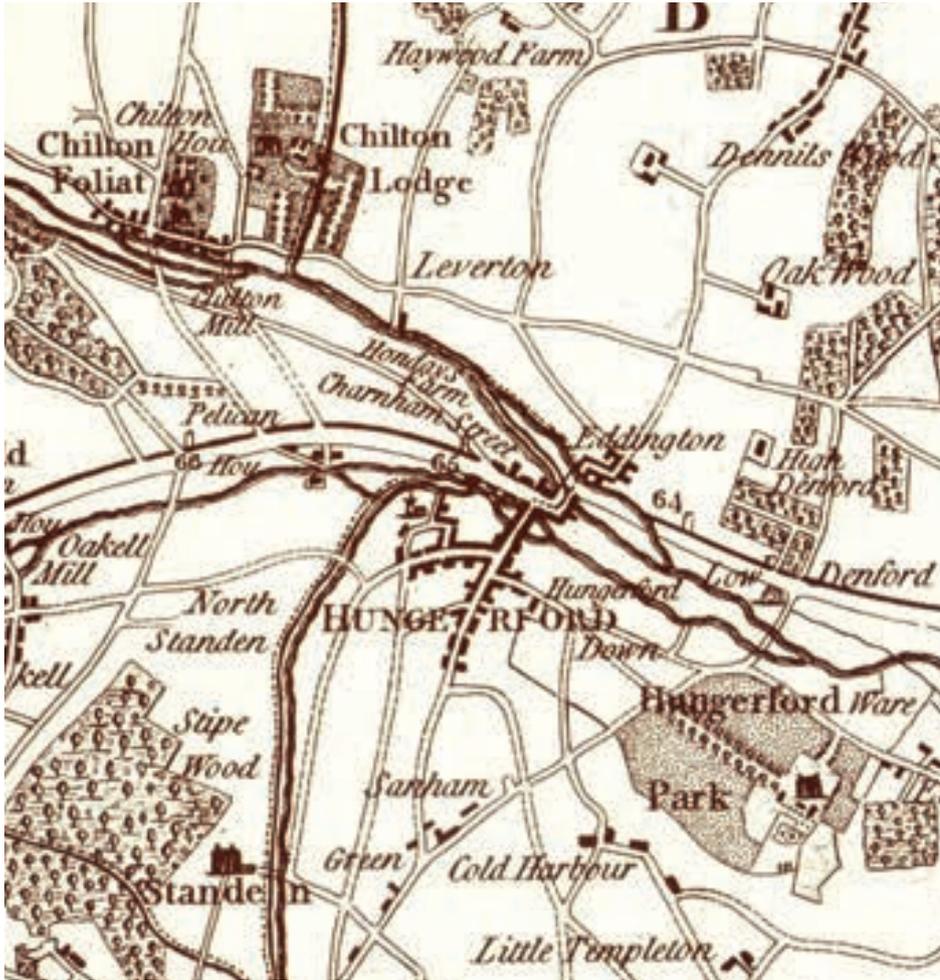
The first statement seems odd today but was correct in the sense that the parish of Hungerford's other significant inns, although nearby, were in a separate township, and indeed in a separate county, being on the other side of the border with Wiltshire formed by the River Dun. They stood on Charnham Street, a section of the great London-to-Bath road, which didn't enter the town.

Fortunately for The Three Swans, another great road did come through the town. The north-south route from Oxford to Salisbury passed the front door of the inn, which was noted for being close to the mid-point between the two cities. This was attested by a milestone attached to the wall bearing the inscription 'To Oxford 26 Sarum 27'.

Any claim that The Three Swans was the oldest inn in England was probably one of hundreds of identical claims made for different inns all over the country. It could never have been substantiated and has long-since been forgotten. Local historians have determined that the core of the current building cannot date to before 1566 when records suggest that its predecessor was lost in a fire that destroyed a large part of the town. Perhaps the original building was an inn, and perhaps the current building was erected as an inn. We simply don't know.

Today the earliest surviving record of an inn on the site is from a document of 1661. It recalls that on 15 March 1645 Thomas Smith, gentleman, granted scholarships for two local poor boys at a cost of 40 shillings per annum, funded by the rental income from 'an inn on the east side of the High Street called The Three Swans ... in the occupation then and now of Thomas Strangeways, vintner'. Another record reveals that Thomas Strangeways was a vintner in Hungerford in 1632, so it's possible he was at The Three Swans then, or even earlier.





A section from a 1792 map shows the London-to-Bath road passing Denford, then crossing the Berkshire/Wiltshire border (dotted line), and continuing westwards along Charnham Street. The road from Oxford approaches Eddington from the north, crosses the River Kennet, and on entering Charnham Street it turns south, over the River Dunn and into Hungerford. Map courtesy of Hungerford Virtual Museum.

WILLIAM AND SARAH BELL'S 40 YEARS IN CHARGE



One of The Three Swans Hotel's newly renovated bedrooms.

A record of 1670 names John Bradford as innkeeper at The Three Swans, and then from 1674 it was occupied by William Bell.

He had been the tenant innkeeper at The Black Bear Inn, on Charnham Street, from at least 1668, but then he apparently acquired sufficient wealth to purchase the freehold of The Three Swans. It appears that he ran both inns until 1691, after which he gave up the tenancy of The Black Bear. He died in 1702, leaving his widow Sarah to carry on the business of The Three Swans until her death in 1714.

ASSETS OF THE THREE SWANS IN 1714

Sarah Bell died intestate, and so an inventory had to be drawn up of her 'goods and chattels'. The inventory survives, and provides a fascinating insight into the assets of The Three Swans at this time.

It had six bedrooms named Bell, Dragon, Swan, Crown, Gatehouse and New Room – plus a bedroom over the kitchen, three beds in 'the Passage and Shuffleboard Chamber' and an unquantified number of beds in 'the Gallery and Garrets'. In some of these rooms it would have been normal for travellers to share with complete strangers. The public rooms included one called Rose, a Parlour/Buttery, and a New Chamber.

The contents of a brew-house included two 'furnaces', which probably meant coppers, in which the beer 'wort' was boiled. The beer-cellar contained eight hogsheads (54 gallons each) and three barrels (36 gallons each), which suggests a vibrant throughput of ale. The wine cellar contained 146 gallons of white wine, claret and 'canary' – the generic term for a fortified wine or sherry – plus 10 gallons of brandy. There was stabling for travellers' horses, and in the adjoining outhouses were 20 tons of hay, a cow and eight pigs.

THE 60-YEAR OWNERSHIP OF THE ELLIOTT FAMILY

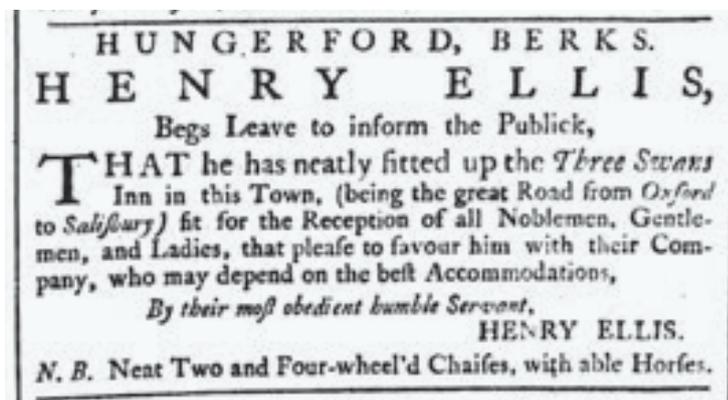
The Three Swans passed to William and Sarah Bell's daughter, Mary Elliott, and her husband Robert, who together owned and operated the inn from 1714 until Robert's death in 1726. Thereafter Mary seems to have let the inn to a series of tenant innkeepers. On her death in 1733 her son William Elliott, then aged 21, took charge as owner and innkeeper.

A fire-insurance policy dated 1743 named William Elliott as the inn-holder, and described the building as timber-built and tiled. On William Elliott's premature death in 1748, aged 37, his widow Henrietta either carried on alone or let the inn to a tenant innkeeper. In 1751 she married Henry Ellis, a brewer from Arundel in Sussex, and in 1756 he announced in the local press that he had 'neatly fitted up The Three Swans Inn for the reception of all noblemen, gentlemen and ladies'.

Henry and Henrietta Ellis perhaps hoped to attract some of the growing coaching trade of the period, but the records show little sign of any such activity at The Three Swans. Even a weekly coach between Oxford and Salisbury, advertised in the press in 1766, made its overnight stop in Hungerford at the rival Black Bear Inn, which also benefited from most of the coaching trade on the London-to-Bath road. It isn't clear what happened to Henry Ellis, but from at least 1767 the inn was run by a tenant innkeeper, Joseph Lawrence.

Henrietta Ellis died in 1773, and the ownership of The Three Swans descended to her two unmarried daughters from her first marriage, Harriet Elliott and Mary Elliott. In September the same year they put the freehold of The Three Swans up for sale by auction. The sale was completed in 1774, bringing to a close exactly 100 years of ownership by the Bell/Elliott family.

"A fire-insurance policy dated 1743 ... described the building as timber-built and tiled."



Oxford Journal, 20 November 1756. © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to the British Newspaper Archive. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

TIMBER-BUILT INN GIVEN A GEORGIAN MAKEOVER



The milestone at The Three Swans, which is not in its original position.

From the sale notice of 1773 we learn that The Three Swans at this time had three parlours on the ground floor, a large dining room and six bedrooms on the first floor, two garrets, a complete brew-house, a vault and cellars, a six-stall stable and other stabling for 40 horses.

The whole was described as 'capable of improvement'. Also up for sale were the contents of the inn including all the furniture, hogshead casks, barrels, and brewing utensils including a copper.

The purchaser, who paid £400, was 24-year-old John Pearce, a local gentleman, and the owner by marriage of the manor of Standen Hussey, to the south of Hungerford. It seems likely that it was during his ownership that The Three Swans, previously described as 'timber-built', was given a makeover in the Georgian style of architecture to produce today's façade of rendered-brick and sash windows. The painted milestone attached to the wall was probably also added at this time, although not in the position we see it today.

EDWARD BEAR AND THE LONDON DILIGENCE

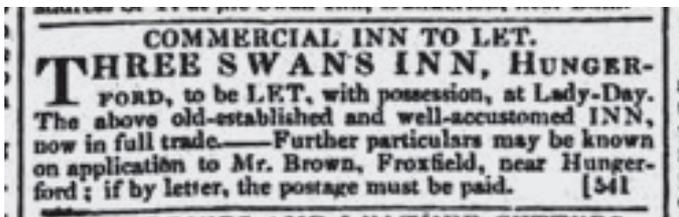
From 1776, records show that the tenant innkeeper was Edward Bear. He benefited slightly from the growing coaching trade. In 1780 a long-established firm in Newbury – Newbury Machines – started a service to London, setting off from The Three Swans. It ran three days a week, leaving the inn at 6.30am, and leaving London each following day at 8am. Inside passengers paid 19 shillings while outside passengers and children on laps paid half. It was apparently a short-lived enterprise. Edward Bear died in 1788 after which his widow, Deborah, ran The Three Swans until at least 1796.



The Three Swans Hotel cafe.

NEW OWNER BUILDS A COMMERCIAL BREWERY...

In 1826, a newspaper advertisement for a new innkeeper at The Three Swans identified the owner at that time as a wealthy local businessman, John Brown, from the nearby village of Froxfield.



Salisbury and Winchester Journal, 6 March 1826.
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Brown capitalised on a great new opportunity in the licensed trade. The 1830 Beerhouse Act aimed to steer the population away from ruinous gin drinking by allowing any rate-paying householder to buy a licence to open their home for the sale and consumption of beer. Entrepreneurs rushed to build new breweries to supply the rapidly growing demand.

Brown bought a large plot of land in Hungerford, the remnant of the old manor of Hungerford-Ingleford, which lay to the north of The Three Swans between the present railway bridge and the Kennet and Avon Canal. He replaced a brew-house behind the old manor house with a completely new, commercial-scale brewery, served by two existing maltings located close-by. The new Manor Brewery was operational by early 1832.

...AND IS ACCUSED OF HYPOCRISY

In November 1831, while his new Manor Brewery was under construction, John Brown had a letter published in a local newspaper expressing his opposition to new, job-saving technologies in agriculture, which during the previous two years had provoked farm-workers' revolts throughout the south of England.

An anonymous response was published in the same newspaper in February 1832, describing Brown as 'a patriotic brewer for the good of the public' but condemning him for 'the immense building lately erected in Hungerford ... [in which] every kind of machinery is erected that can be beneficial to superseding manual labour ... in a parish where upwards of a hundred able-bodied men are destitute of employment.'

WHOLE ENTERPRISE UP FOR SALE

John Brown clearly intended the Manor Brewery to be a long-term commitment. From about 1834 he substantially rebuilt the back of the old manor house, which fronted onto the High Street, and made it his new home. He expanded the business through the rapid acquisition of more inns and public houses, but then in March 1837 he put his home and the entire enterprise up for sale.

The brewery was described as having the 'usual requisites of an eighteen-quarter brewery', which meant a brewing capacity of 18 quarter-tuns, or 18 hogshead casks of 54 gallons each. It was said to be 'a compact and most substantial brewery, erected within the last five years under the superintendence of the present proprietor, who availed himself of the modern improvements in mechanical science'. The two malt-houses in the sale had a combined capacity to steep and roast 22 quarters of barley.

Also included were three inns in Hungerford – The Three Swans, The Duke of Lancaster's Arms and The Crown – and 16 other inns and public houses within a 10-mile radius of the town. The Manor House was described, apparently with some exaggeration, as 'that newly erected genteel freehold dwelling house situate in the High Street ... containing three sitting rooms, kitchen and seven bedrooms, in the occupation of Mr Brown'.

TOMS AND MATTHEWS TAKE OWNERSHIP

The auction was held at The Three Swans, and the purchaser was a newly formed partnership of three local businessmen: John Milligan, a grocer and draper; William Toms, a tanner; and John Matthews, a solicitor. They traded as Milligan and Co. until 1839 when Milligan was dropped and the partnership was renamed Toms and Matthews. John Matthews moved into the Manor House.



The Three Swans Hotel bar.

SPORTING CONNECTIONS

"...William Keen quickly earned a good reputation for the quality of the dinners he provided for several important local organisations..."

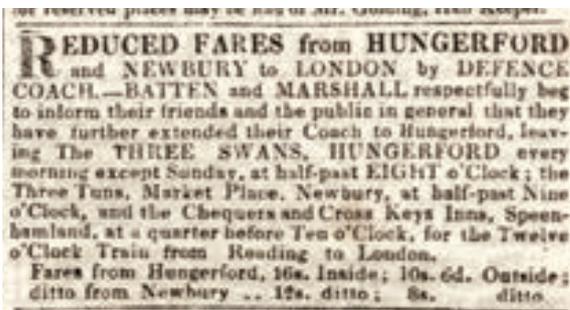
In 1839 The Three Swans was newly let to innkeeper William Keen, aged 34, from Upton in Berkshire. He moved in with his wife Matilda and their two young children. Keen announced their arrival in the press with the news that he had made 'extensive alterations and improvements' to the inn.

Subsequent press reports indicate that William Keen quickly earned a good reputation for the quality of the dinners he provided for several important local organisations that met at The Three Swans. He also got involved in other aspects of community life. He started putting on a dinner at the end of the race days at the annual Hungerford horse races, which were held on the nearby common. Later he became responsible for receiving race entries at The Three Swans, and also for receiving entries on the course during the meetings.

COACH SERVICES ADAPT TO THE RAILWAYS

The rapid spread of the railways meant that the old coaching trade was having to adapt and harmonise with railway routes and timetables.

In 1840 William Keen benefited from this when the Newbury coach-firm of Batten and Marshall advertised that their Newbury-to-London service was now extended to Hungerford. It left The Three Swans every morning except Sundays at 8.30am, passing through Newbury and arriving at Reading in time for passengers to transfer to the new railway service into the capital.



Reading Mercury 6 June 1840. © The British Library Board.
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Archive. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Change in public transport continued apace. Four years later, a trade directory recorded that the only coach service operating from The Three Swans was the 'Penny's Sociable', which ran to Newbury three mornings a week.



NEW OWNER JOHN PLATT

The firm of Toms and Matthews went bankrupt in 1846 with the result that the Manor House, the Manor Brewery and its associated maltings were up for sale again, along with The Three Swans and this time just six other inns and public houses in the district. The purchaser was John Platt, aged 35, previously a farmer from Kingsclere in Hampshire. He and his young family occupied the Manor House, where he would remain for the rest of his long life.

"...previously a farmer from Kingsclere in Hampshire."

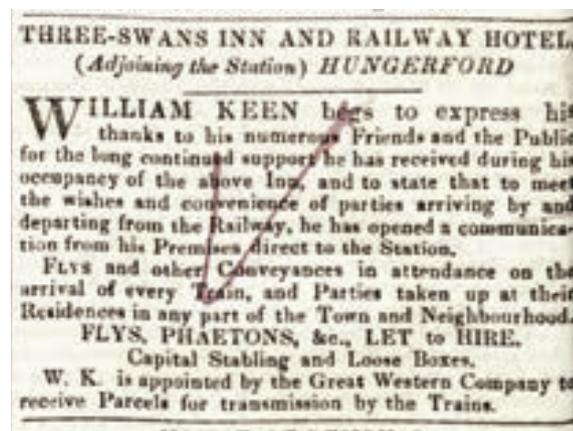
THE RAILWAY BRINGS TRAVELLERS TO THE DOOR

In December 1847 the Berkshire and Hampshire Railway opened a section of line from Reading to Hungerford.

It was an economic boost for the town in general, and for The Three Swans in particular, because the town's new railway station was located about 200 yards behind the inn. While a Railway Tavern was erected near the station, William Keen was still able to take full advantage. In January 1848 he placed a notice in the press under the heading 'Three Swans Inn and Railway Hotel'. The term 'hotel' had come into use to indicate a superior sort of inn, and from now onwards would be applied increasingly to The Three Swans.

The notice advised readers that Keen had opened 'a communication from his premises direct to the station', which in practice meant a rear entrance and pathway through a paddock behind the hotel. He also announced a new service of 'flys [carriages] and other conveyances in attendance of the arrival of every train' and that parties collected could be 'taken up at their residences in any part of the town and neighbourhood'. And finally he advertised that he had been 'appointed by the Great Western Company to receive parcels for transmission by the trains'.

Despite these innovations, it transpired that William Keen had new plans for his own future. By March the same year he had quit The Three Swans and moved to take over a hotel in Bristol.



Reading Mercury 1 January 1848. © The British Library Board.
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JOHN CLARKE FREE AND THE SPORTING TRADITION



Coursing at Ashdown Park (oil on canvas),
Stephen Pearce (1819-1904), Private Collection/Photo
© Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images

The new host at The Three Swans in 1848 was 21-year-old John Clarke Free, who came from Therfield in Hertfordshire. Later the same year he married Jane Bell Dugard, and between them they would run the hotel for the next 44 years.

During this time, the ownership of The Three Swans remained within the Manor Brewery business of Hungerford's Platt family, so it was a golden era of stability for the hotel during a period of strong economic growth for the nation as a whole.

John Clarke Free, who was always recorded in the local press by his full name, maintained and developed the sporting theme nurtured by his predecessor. He hunted with the Craven and Old Berkshire hounds, won prizes at pigeon shoots on the town common, continued the hotel's associations with Hungerford Races, and he was a much-admired host of various formal dinners held by the sporting and hunting fraternity.

The Three Swans became a favourite haunt of gentlemen from London who travelled to Hungerford by train and then hired horses and carriages to take them to the great hare-coursing meetings on the Earl of Craven's estate at Ashdown Park, near Lambourn. This twice-yearly event lasted for three or four days and was widely regarded as one of the best of its kind in the country.



HUNGERFORD'S HOCKTIDE FESTIVAL

John Clarke and Jane Bell Free were keen to involve The Three Swans in as many local events and customs as possible, and one of the most fascinating of these was, and remains, the town's annual, ancient Hocktide Festival.

Hocktide occurred during the second week after Easter, and in medieval times throughout England it was one of the principal annual holidays along with Whitsuntide and Yuletide. The celebration of Hocktide gradually died out during the 1700s, except in Hungerford where it had become integral to ceremonies connected with the annual meeting of the town's chief administrative body – the Town and Manor of Hungerford.

This unusual entity was created in 1617 when Queen Elizabeth I granted the lordship of the town and manor to its citizens. Since then, the 100 or so householders who live within the old town boundary have every year elected a constable as head of the manor together 10 or more court jurors or trustees and several officials, such as bailiffs, ale tasters, a bellman or crier, and two tything men, known as 'tutti-men'.

Edward Bear, a former innkeeper at Three Swans, had been the constable in 1771 and 1778; and John Matthews, a former owner of the inn, had been the town and manor steward from 1831 until his bankruptcy in 1846.

By the 1870s the many customs associated with these annual elections had become sufficiently antiquated and curious to attract the attention of the press nationwide. From their reports we find that the festival included a strong emphasis on ancillary celebrations involving food and drink. As the principal inn of the manor, The Three Swans had doubtless been involved in Hocktide events for centuries. By the time of John Clarke and Jane Bell Free's tenure in the 1870s we learn that it had become central to the feasting.

"...the festival included a strong emphasis on ancillary celebrations involving food and drink."



A WEEK OF HOCKTIDE FEASTING AND FUN



The Three Swans Hotel restaurant.

The main day of the festival is the Tuesday of the second week after Easter, known as Hock Tuesday or Tutti Day. In the early morning, the manor bellman sounds the constable's old horn, dated 1634, to summon all the commoners or householders of the manor to the Town Hall for the annual meeting of the manor court.

Those attending formally elect the constable together with office holders and jurors for the ensuing year. While the meeting is in progress the two tutti-men tour the town, each carrying their staff of office – a tutti-pole decorated at the top with flowers and ribbons. At every house they collect a penny or a kiss from the lady of the house, ostensibly as their reward for keeping the peace during the year.

The nature of the feasting during Hocktide has varied over the years, but in John Clarke and Jane Bell Free's time at The Three Swans it all began the previous Friday when the officers of the manor met at the John O'Gaunt Inn, then known as the Duke of Lancaster's Arms, to approve the year's accounts and plan the week ahead. A supper was served of macaroni, Welsh rabbit and watercress, which were popular tavern dishes at the time, accompanied by copious amounts of punch.

On Hock Tuesday, the tutti-men, after their morning visits, repaired to The Three Swans at lunchtime to join the other officials, the jurors and the constable of the manor for a celebration meal. Afterwards the tutti-men returned to their tour of duty while their colleagues stayed at the hotel and passed the afternoon regaling each other with speeches, drinking punch and smoking clay pipes. They also tossed pennies and oranges out of the hotel windows, into the street, to be collected by children who had been given the day off school.

Later in the week, on the Friday evening, the constable invited all the senior figures of the town to join him for a banquet at the town hall, which was catered for by John Clarke and Jane Bell Free. And the next day, just to finish off the festivities, there was an official lunch for the manor officials, hosted by the Frees at The Three Swans.

A VIEW OF THE THREE SWANS IN THE 1870s

The photograph of The Three Swans below shows the original position of the hotel entrance and portico, with the Georgian milestone just visible high up and to the right of it. Beyond the railway bridge is a faint glimpse of the hotel owner's home, the Manor House.



The Three Swans Hotel, photographed by William Softley Parry, probably circa 1871-74.
Image courtesy Hungerford Virtual Museum.

The undated image was captured by professional photographer William Softley Parry, which means it can be dated to sometime from 1871, the earliest year he could have moved from his native north-east of England to live and work in Hungerford, and before the mid-1870s, by which time the very specific small format of the photographic print, known as a carte de visite, had been replaced by a larger format. This being so, it's likely that the man and woman at the centre of the group of four people are the hotelkeepers John Clarke and Jane Bell Free.

If the man is John Clarke Free then the photograph must date to before October 1874, which was when he died at the age of 48, reportedly after enduring a long and painful illness.

JANE FREE CARRIES ON

On the death of John Clarke Free, the national sporting newspaper, *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, noted that he had been 'passionately fond of all field sports, and for several years past added much to the convenience and comfort of coursers en route for the great Ashdown Meeting'. His widow, Jane Bell Free, carried on running The Three Swans for another 18 years.

OWNERSHIP PASSES TO JOHN PLATT JUNIOR



Hungerford Town Hall, opened in 1871.

John Platt, owner of the Manor Brewery and of The Three Swans, died at his Manor House home in 1890, aged 80. A newspaper obituary commented that he was 'one of the town's oldest and most prominent inhabitants'.

It was said that he had made the Manor Brewery 'one of the largest concerns in the county', that he had held all the offices of the town and manor, including constable from 1857 to 1860, and that he had been instrumental in securing the erection of a new town hall and the corn exchange. Seven years before his death he had handed over the reins of the brewery to his son, John Platt junior, of Willow Lodge, Bridge Street. The son had served as the town constable from 1881 to 1888.

From 1890 the Manor House was occupied by John Platt junior's son, George Edmund Platt, then aged 22 and married with a baby daughter. He had recently become the brewer at the family firm.

ALL CHANGE IN THE 1890s

Jane Bell Free retired from running The Three Swans in 1892, at the age of 67. That year she catered for the last time at the constable's annual Hocktide banquet at the Town Hall, and it was reported in the press that she had done the job for more than 40 years.

Her replacement at The Three Swans was Francis Waldron Church, aged 44, a cousin of the hotel and Manor Brewery owner, John Platt junior, and previously a salesman for the brewery.

It was a period of change and widespread consolidation in the brewing industry. In 1897 in nearby Newbury, the two brewing firms of Thomas Edward Hawkins and Edmund Parfitt merged to form Hawkins and Parfitt South Berks Brewery Company Ltd. The following year, the new company bought the Manor Brewery in Hungerford, retaining George Edmund Platt as its Hungerford district manager.



END OF AN ERA FOR THE MANOR HOUSE AND BREWERY

In 1901 George Edmund Platt, now aged 33, completed his fourth and final year as the constable of the town and manor, and in that year he and his family moved out of the Manor House to live at the south-east end of the town, at the Priory. The move marked the end of a 70-year-long association between Hungerford Manor House and The Three Swans.



The main building of the Manor Brewery, pictured after 1908 when it became the premises of Hungerford Sanitary Laundry Company Ltd. Today it's the site of Tesco's supermarket car park. Photograph courtesy Hungerford Virtual Museum.

It was also a time when rationalisation of brewing capacity was inevitable. The Manor Brewery was closed sometime shortly after 1902, the year of the last-reported employees' annual day-trip to Southampton. The company retained an office in High Street, and George Edmund Platt continued as the firm's district manager for many years to follow. He was reputed to have a chair at The Three Swans dedicated for his exclusive use.

While continuing to work for the brewery he also became a founding director of the Hungerford Sanitary Laundry Company, which was set up in the redundant Manor Brewery buildings in 1908.

WINGED WHEEL OF THE CYCLISTS' TOURING CLUB



The Three Swans circa 1900 displaying the CTC headquarters plaque. The milestone is partially obscured by the portico. Photo courtesy Hungerford Virtual Museum.

The photograph shown left of The Three Swans in around 1900 shows a plaque high above the entrance depicting of the winged-wheel symbol of the Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC).

It was formed in 1878 in response to the widespread popularity of long-distance cycling. In 1887 the club allowed recommended hotels to display its plaque, in this case an early design that was allocated to the club's so-called headquarters hotels.

'NEW TRADITIONS' OF THE HOCKTIDE FESTIVAL

From around 1900, newspaper reports of the Hocktide Festivities at The Three Swans, started to include a couple of events that had not previously been mentioned in the press.

Under the supervision of hotelkeeper Francis Church, it was reported that first-timers at the Hock-Day lunch were identified as 'colts to be shod'. A 'blacksmith' was tasked to pretend to drive nails into the shoe heels of each 'colt' until he cried 'punch', which according to one contemporary press report was his agreement to pay for another bowl of punch for the party.

At around the same time it was reported that later in the afternoon the revellers at The Three Swans were served with anchovy toast – a popular snack of the period. Both activities would become enduring traditions of Hock Tuesday.



A restored example of the CTC plaque.
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One of The Three Swans Hotel's newly renovated bedrooms.

ROYAL HUNTSMAN IN CHARGE



Above: Royal Huntsman Frank Goodall junior in 1900.
Photo courtesy Tony Roberts, the British Hunting Collection.

Right: Shoeing a colt, possibly Frank Goodall, at The Three Swans courtyard in 1913. Note the tutti-pole, the punch bowl and the churchwarden pipes.
Photo courtesy Hungerford Virtual Museum.



Following the retirement of Francis Waldron Church, the new keeper of The Three Swans from 1913 was 61-year-old Frank Goodall – a farmer from Binfield, near Bracknell in Berkshire, who famously had been the last Royal Huntsman for Queen Victoria's Royal Buckhounds.

He came from an esteemed family of huntsmen. His uncle, also called Frank Goodall, had been the Royal Huntsman from 1872 to 1888. The younger Frank spent most of his career employed by hunts in Ireland, and he retired there in 1899, aged 47, to focus on farming and auctioneering. However, such was his reputation that in 1900, when the master of the Royal Buckhounds in Berkshire needed a new huntsman, Frank Goodall was persuaded out of retirement to follow his famous uncle into the most prestigious job in the hunting world.

Early in January 1901, only three months into his first season, there was a tragedy for him and his wife Amy when their eldest daughter, Constance, died of typhoid, in Ireland, aged 19. Before Frank could return to work, the hunt season was brought to an abrupt end with the death on 22 January of Queen Victoria. The new king, Edward VII, favoured fox hunting over stag hunting, and so in August 1901, before the next season could begin, the Royal Buckhounds were disbanded. Shortly afterwards Frank Goodall found himself featured in the press nationwide when it was revealed that the king had personally handed him a cheque for an astonishing £1,000 as compensation for his loss of office.



CHAOS OF THE GREAT WAR

Frank and Amy Goodall soon gained a reputation as 'genial hosts', which was just as well because the start of the Great War in 1914 threw the country into a long period of economic chaos, in which only the best hotelkeepers could expect to survive in business.

Among the many difficulties they faced was the introduction of very tight licensing laws. From 1914 alcohol could no longer be sold before 12 noon, nor between 2.40pm and 6.30pm, and nor after 9.30pm.

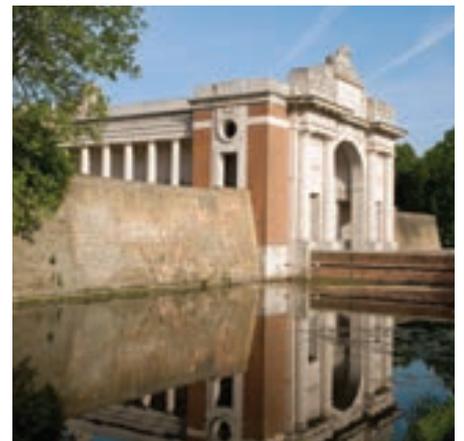
By 1916 every community had been affected by the loss of life on the front line, and so while in that year Frank Goodall was thrown into the antics of the Hocktide festival by his appointment as one of the two tutti-men, the usual hilarity of Tutti Day was muted. Press reports of the lunch at The Three Swans noted that it was 'not so protracted as usual' and was 'shorn of much of its gaiety'.

HORRORS OF THE FRONT LINE BROUGHT HOME

It wasn't long before the worst of the harsh realities of the war were brought home to Frank and Amy Goodall. It was reported in the press in July 1917 that their elder son, Stephen, was 'instantly killed in action in France on June 14, aged 24'. They had now lost two of their children as young adults.

At around this time Amy Goodall suffered a stroke that left her permanently impaired. Grief perhaps consumed the couple, whose lives ended four years later at The Three Swans, within three months of each other. Frank died in late February 1921, aged 68, and Amy died at the end of May, aged 69. They died before the erection of a memorial to their son, whose name is now inscribed at the Menin Gate Memorial at Ypres in Belgium, among those of more than 54,000 soldiers who have no known grave.

"Press reports of the lunch at The Three Swans noted that it was ... 'shorn of much of its gaiety'."



The Menin Gate Memorial at Ypres in Belgium.

THE WORKHOUSE MASTER

The new hotelkeepers in 1921 were Harry and Emma Wigglesworth, who were previously the master and matron of Hungerford Workhouse. They stayed for only three years; their departure marking the beginning of a long period of regular change at the hotel.

In 1920 the hotel owner, the South Berks Brewing Company, had been taken over by H & G Simond Ltd, of Reading. That firm sold The Three Swans in 1932 to a local dignitary, Major Humphrey le Fleming Fairfax Harvey.



Photo courtesy Hungerford Virtual Museum, from an original print supplied by Mary Devlin, née Wilmott.

TUTTI-MEN AT THE INN

Between the wars, the Hock-Tuesday distribution of pennies and oranges to young children ceased to happen outside The Three Swans and instead became associated with the tour around town of the tutti-men.

In this photograph, from about 1945, some children have followed the tutti-men, Douglas Wilmott and Alfred Macklin, into the yard of The Three Swans, where the men have gone to some extremes to claim their kisses.

MODERN TIMES



Major Fairfax Harvey sold The Three Swans to another private investor in 1947, after which it changed hands several more times during the 1950s and 60s. During this period the hotel entrance was moved slightly to the right, and widened, which resulted in the Georgian milestone having to be moved to its current position to the left of the doorway, and lower down the wall.

In the 1970s the Hock-Tuesday lunch, including the shoeing of colts, was moved from The Three Swans to the town's Corn Exchange, which caters for larger numbers and enables the manor to sell tickets for the event to the public. The tradition of serving anchovy toast continues at The Three Swans. These days, free of charge, all comers can enjoy the snacks along with the constable and officers of the manor who gather at about 9pm to welcome the tutti-men to the last and most-rewarding call on their tour of the town.

Frequent changes of owner and manager of The Three Swans continued up to and after the millennium. In 2016 the hotel was purchased by the Coaching Inn Group, which is committed to preserving and keeping faith with the heritage and unique characteristics of all the historic buildings in its care. It has invested £1 million in a comprehensive refurbishment and upgrade of The Three Swans in order to meet evolving customer needs.



A late photograph of Hungerford Manor House, the home of successive Three Swans owners, or their representative, from circa 1834 to 1901. It was demolished in 1965 to make way for a petrol station. That in turn was demolished to create the present access to Tesco's Supermarket car park. Photo courtesy Hungerford Virtual Museum.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Dr Hugh Pihlens, chairman and archivist of Hungerford Historical Association, and editor and webmaster of Hungerford Virtual Museum, www.hungerfordvirtualmuseum.co.uk, for permission to draw from the museum's extensive collection of research, and to reproduce images from the photographic archive.



The Three Swans Hotel, Hungerford, is part of The Coaching Inn Group Ltd. The group has a particular passion for lovely old historic inns and is fortunate enough now to have fifteen of these iconic buildings in our collection, several of them former coaching inns. We have established a reputation for refurbishing, revitalising and breathing life back into these inns, creating elegant, comfortable and well-priced accommodation, tempting menus, relaxed and stylish bars and coffee lounges where friends, families and business people can relax and enjoy everything we have on offer.

Our vision for the future is based around our core value of 'Unlocking Potential'. From our properties to our people and everything in between, we take every opportunity to invest in developing all aspects of our business to give our guests the best possible experience.

As a company we are rapidly expanding and bringing new hotels into the Coaching Inn Group. You can see the latest additions to our group by visiting www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.

We hope you've enjoyed your visit to The Three Swans Hotel, Hungerford, and would love to invite you to try our other venues, nationwide. For full details please visit www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.



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